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## Area Programs As Fields For Graduate Study

During the War and since the War there has been a good deal of inquiry into the nature of humanistic studies: an effort to define them and, once defined, to prescribe them for students. Two motives seem to be behind this inquiry:

(1) the effort to keep abreast of the natural sciences as they add meaning and significance (even though the significance may be terrible) to life;

(2) the need to vary the pattern of academic disciplines in certain courses hitherto considered humanistic.

This re-appraisal of liberal studies may be a parallel to the kind of "curriculum reform" urged by Francis Bacon in his criticism of studies removed from the concrete experience of the senses: "For what is founded on nature grows and increases; while what is founded on opinion varies but increases not." (*Aphorism* LXXIV).

Academic studies in literature have been too far removed from the stimulus of life environment. Many curricula in English literature have been completely oriented to concern with figures remote in soil and clime to the background of American students, their appeal one of literary appreciation but a vacuum for shared responses to locale or to history and memories since the colonization of America. Visual-audio aids may be used but they cannot make vivid a literature which may be in "cold storage" for many students. It is to tap, wherever possible, new learning reserves and to supply new investigative approaches that "area studies" at all levels have developed in the last thirty years. My paper is concerned with area programs at graduate level, but we need a brief glance at the background in the area point of view before we refer to the progress of area graduate study programs.

The first area studies in America were creative: the work of Hawthorne and Emerson in New England could be called "area" studies, explorations into the eloquent facts of individual experience and of the transcendental regions of the New England intellect. Mark Twain's greatness lies in his investigation of Mississippi valley terrain and the mountainous West, an area of river bottoms, hill country and mining camps—not so transcendental as vulgar, but rewarding enough for research activity. The local colorists—Agustus Baldwin Longstreet, Edward Eggleston, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Alice French, Hamlin Garland—added roots to creative writing emphasizing area values in setting, characterization, and motif. Without this background, inevitable to creative expression in America, there would have been no regional schools of critical studies.

I need not document the story of regionalism as a critical movement: the Connecticut Wits, the Southern Agrarians, the Midwest Realists, the Southwest Primitivists and Frontier School. It is enough to repeat the challenge of *regionalism* to the *absolutism* of esthetic standards based upon any cultural tradition, that of Greece, Italy, France or England and any single literary arbitrament whether of Aristotle, Horace, or Matthew Arnold. Note that I said the "absolutisms" of critical touchstones. Criticism, like all other fields dealing with values, can never escape the three great relativisms: nationality, time, and place.

So with graduate studies: institutions of learning, like other ancient and revered institutions of mankind, tend to be tied to absolutisms and authorities of one sort or another. One age sets up the canons of taste and the patterns of thought for another. Because as teachers we lean upon rules rather than upon the capacity for appreciation, we are likely to apply the canons of 18th or 19th century criticism to 20th century literature and be as much in error as Sidney was in condemning the dramatic poetry of his own day because it failed to measure up to the canons of Augustan Rome. The literary Emily Posts are likely to hold sway long after the conditions for which they formulated rules have so altered that their laws have neither justification nor excuse for being.

Science alone since the Renaissance has constantly moved out of the custom built models of the past. Teaching and research in both the humanities and the social sciences have been much less experimental and imaginative. In areas of graduate study, one cannot imagine a physicist limiting his researches to the concepts of space and matter developed by Newton or a biologist completing a thesis on Aristotle's "History of Animals". Yet, as H. L. Mencken points out in *Supplement Two* of *The American Language*, contemporary philologists have prepared "searching studies of such esoteric Indian languages as Cuna, Chitamacha, Yuma and Klamath-Modoc, not to mention Eskimo" but no comprehensive inductive grammar of the common speech of the United States has yet appeared. I talked with a member of the Graduate Faculty of a distinguished eastern university who was directing a number of graduate studies in the works of Thomas Killigrew, but who made me feel diffident about mentioning the works of Charles Fletcher Lummis, author of several score pioneering tudies of Southwest history, folklore, and balladry in addition to founding the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles.

The area programs whether they deal with American literature, American speech, American behavior (I suppose the Kinsey Report is a kind of area study) or American art and music are meant to *extend the horizons of investigation* at both graduate and undergraduate levels. These programs are not against any other curricula; they do not devaluate philology (rather they apply it in a limited but intensive sphere); they do not oppose the research techniques or emphases in any period of a national literature or in comparative studies (rather they make use of the best devices in literary or language research in a defined area where the relationships between literature, language, folkways, music, art, and architecture may be collected and studied at first hand). With this background, I shall proceed to a brief recapitulation of what, at present, is the status of these programs in the United States.

The Report of the "Committee on College Study of American Literature and Letters" (1938-48) of the National Council of Teachers of English lists eighty educational institutions in the United States offering concentrations in courses called American Civilization. A summary of this material issued on February 5, 1948, by Tremaine McDowell, a member of the NCTE Committee, reports that sixty-one institutions offered the A. B. degree in American Civilization in 1946-47, in 53 instances through an inter-departmental curriculum and in eight through a program centered in the department of history or of English. Fourteen graduate schools offered the M. A. degree and fifteen the Ph. D. Among the latter are Harvard, Yale, Pennsylvania, Chicago, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Programs in Hispanic Studies (Texas, New Mexico), in Scandinavian Studies (Minnesota), in South Asia (Pennsylvania) illustrate the application of the principle of integration elsewhere than in American history and literature. Admirable guides to institutions in this country may be found in such programs as the Salzburg Seminar in American Civilization held in December, 1947, or in the Plan for Study of American Civilization provided by Professor Sigmund Skard at the University of Oslo, July 15, 1948.

Objections have been advanced to the Area Programs as diffuse or as duplicating graduate programs already provided by major fields supplemented by two minors or by flexibly coordinated graduate work. But proper supervision by a Group Committee is adequate safeguard against a miscellaneous or diffuse program and the delimitation of study of literature, history, philosophy and art to a specific area produces a unity sometimes lacking in the accepted graduate disciplines. If study for the doctorate in an area program comes after completion of the Master's degree, (as provided in The American Civilization Program at the University of New Mexico) the criticism of over-specialization is likewise answered, for increased specialization is to be expected in graduate work beyond the M.A.

Area programs have introduced "latitudinarian" elements into the graduate discipline, have kindled the imagination in the investigation of literature from the viewpoint of related arts, have illuminated studies in history by the mirror of letters and fine arts. Social studies play their role in the synthesis. A lively new force in both working principle and methodology has thus entered the graduate field in American institutions.

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## In Memoriam

It's disturbing. American Literature since 1900 has become "Contemporary Trends*". Scott Fitzgerald and Gertrude Stein are "primitivists". Eliot is a "symbolist", and Sandburg a "collectivist". Thurber is a "liberal" and Thomas Wolfe a "conservative". The glory of Vachel Lindsay has become a passel of selections, with notes. ("Lindsay was a somewhat inconsistent Democrat, who, however, was also an intense admirer of Tolstoy and certain other socialists.") And Mencken is among the "intelligentsia"! Thus the anthologist, skilled in literary dissection—even vivisection—and the obscene display of selected vital organs. Inevitable, no doubt, but a disturbing reminder of death's shadow creeping over a living literature.

* Contemporary Trends, Nelson and Cargill, Macmillan, 1949.

## An Answer to Prof. Sargent

Having read with great interest Professor Sargent's long review of Welleck and Warren's Theory of Literature in the September issue of the *CEA Critic*, I should like to challenge some of his viewpoints.

In spite of his careful presentation of Welleck and Warren's ideas, the reviewer assumes that literature, an art, instead of being an end in itself, is only a means to an end. He states, for example, that the New Criticism has "boxed literature off into a kind of self-contained isolation ward." And he wonders if this "has not been achieved at too great a cost to the whole field and role of literature in actual life." What this role is, Professor Sargent fails to explain. But he implies, it seems to me, that literature is a kind of servant to life, *i.e.*, not an end, but a means. Later in the review, he writes, "We may regard literature as unique, and yet as instrumental—not to science and society—but to the spirit of man and the good life." Here again he assumes that art is not an end in itself but that it is only a means to an end—the development of what he calls "the spirit of man and the good life." But actually are not these two phrases simply vague names for morality? And since morality is the product of society, do not Welleck and Warren mean simply that art should *not* serve morality, or society, or *anything* for that matter, as a means to an end, but should, rather, be completely, uninhibitedly, an end in itself? In H. L. Mencken's *A Book of Prefaces* there is an essay entitled "Puritanism as a Literary Force," in which the author deplores the fact that American critics in general tend to judge a work of art on moralistic rather than artistic principles. Lastly, in the final paragraph of the review Professor Sargent implies, for a third time, that literature is not to be regarded as an end. For he says that literature must serve society and that teachers must defend the place of literature in the lives of their students and not offer to them just "a cluster of signs, completely integrated, whose 'prime and chief function is fidelity to its own nature'." This derogatory reference to the "cluster of signs", of course, tends to overlook the fact that such a cluster may be, and often is, in literature, as well as in other arts, a beautiful and even glorious object, the prostitution of which to the uses of society might be a terrible desecration.

In addition to this major error there are two or three minor mistakes that should be brought to light. First, the reviewer attacks Welleck and Warren for saying that "sympathetic understanding and enjoyment of literature are pre-conditions of the study of literature." But they *are!* For the very good reason that to proceed with anything else in mind would show a predisposition, a bias. Certainly a critic, or even a scholar for that matter, not to mention a mere teacher or a student, should be open-minded and should make certain he understands the text before he attempts expressing a value judgment on it. And if he be not sympathetic to art in general, he then should turn to ditch-digging or to some other occupation for which he does have sympathy. Let us not forget, also, that a great number of classical critics have insisted that art does provide *enjoyment*, or the high pleasure of the mind. This does not mean that it should be *used* either to build a better society or to serve the good life, although these might be effects incidentally derivative from an open-minded and enjoyably sympathetic contemplation of beauty. Second, Professor Sargent refers to the inclusiveness, the awareness, the ironies, and tensions of a work of art as "extra-esthetic." These seem to me to be esthetic, not extra-esthetic, since they are created effects subsisting within the particular representation, or work of art. Eliot's essay on *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, part two, may be cited, because it makes clear the difference between the emotion received from contemplating a work of art (the Elgin marbles, for example) and the emotion received from a natural act (kissing one's mother-in-law, for example). The "difference between art and life is absolute," as Eliot says in this same essay. This is undoubtedly the reason the New Critics insist on the absolute separation of the two categories. Perhaps it is also the reason they have been so often unjustly accused of approaching literature *in vacuo*. Third and last, Professor Sargent defends the "enthusiasts" in art on the grounds that they are devoting their lives to it. He says, "It is only because I do believe in its first rate importance that I can urge men and women to devote their lives to it." But suppose with missionary zeal we do convert all our students to devote their lives to literature, what shall we have gained after our hard work of conversion if they cannot either construct or interpret works of art, if, to use a colloquialism, they become "all hepped up" about literature without actually comprehending so much as a single line of it? Enthusiasm alone does not lead to enlightenment. For my part, I think the scholar ought to turn critic.

Richard E. Amacher
Rutgers University

## "Explicator" Heard From

Though Professor Sargent's rating of poets according to the New Criticism is largely right, it is not entirely so. Since it may represent the general belief, we should like to raise questions.

We are basing this reply on our manuscript bibliography of poetry explications published since 1925. The number of poems by a particular author that have been explicated is not a final authority, of course. Explications in the bibliography are not necessarily favorable, and the listing is compiled under certain self-imposed limitations. Still, as Professor Sargent says, the major triumph of the New Criticism is its close analysis of poems, and our statistical evidence may thus be worth recording.

To the seventeen poets mentioned by Professor Sargent, we have added seven others. In the order of the number of poems that have been explicated, our scale of authors goes: Yeats 52, Donne 37, Eliot 30, Shakespeare (songs and sonnets) 28, Wordsworth 25, Housman 25, Ransom 23, Browning 21, Shelley 19, Frost 19, Keats 18, Hopkins 15, Auden 14, Blake 13, Warren 12, Marvell 11, Pope 11, Tennyson 10, Milton 7, Arnold 6, Byron 3, Dryden 3, Cowley 2, Brooks 0.

Let us now read the disputed passage, inserting parenthetically the place in this scale (high, high middle, low middle, and low quartile) of each of the poets:

"The New Criticism . . . has already established new valuations. Of course, poems which come off well in this process, go up in the scale; others, down. Seventeenth-Century literature, especially the metaphysicals like Donne (high), Crowley (low), and Marvell (low middle), has been exalted to new heights. (Cf. Shakespeare, high.) The status of Milton (low) . . . however, remains as yet hanging in the balance. Dryden (low) and Pope (low middle) yield satisfactory results. Of the romantics, Wordsworth (high), Byron (low), and Shelley (high middle) fare badly. Really only Blake (low middle), and Keats (high middle) survive. Browning (high middle) and Arnold (low), of course, are pushed further down hill. (Cf. Tennyson, low middle.) The real darlings become Hopkins (high middle), Yeats (high), Auden (low middle), and their younger followers on both sides of the Atlantic. (Cf. Housman, high; Frost, high middle.) As has been remarked, often the New Critics and the New Poets coincide (cf. Ransom, high middle; Warren, low middle; Brooks, low)—a fact which has often aroused the suspicions of certain opponents of the New Criticism."

We should like to repeat that our point is not that Professor Sargent is altogether wrong. We do think he errs somewhat, and he also errs when he elsewhere says: "And it is notable that the analysis always proves to be far longer than the original poem."

Analyses regularly printed in *The Explicator* are often shorter than the works (of both poetry and fiction) under scrutiny, and thereby do not always appear at disadvantage with more leisurely performances. But in this matter there is not much clash between the New and Old criticism, at least as long as *Beowulf* receives its full semester.

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The University of New Mexico

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Strang Lawson has been appointed Chairman of the English Department at Colgate.

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## AMERICAN STUDIES

### *I. AMHERST*

(New England Meeting, May 7th, 1949; Prof. George F. Whicher, Amherst, speaker; Prof. Norman Pearson, Yale, chairman; digest prepared by Prof. Kenneth W. Cameron, Trinity, and Prof. William G. O'Donnell, U. of Mass. Discussion leader, Prof. Loyd Haberly, U. of Mass.).

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The American Studies Course at Amherst is organized to begin with the student, at the level of the student's thinking, and to go on from him rather than to impose upon him matter neatly arranged by the mind of the teacher. It is different, therefore, in technique from routine courses, which start with a definition of the subject, proceed to a divisioning into parts, and end with an analysis of the parts.

Calling attention to Tremaine McDowell's study of similar new experiments the speaker presented the two possible bases for a course involving collaboration: (1) Let the course be a *history of ideas*, emphasizing literature and philosophy, with a few trimmings from the social sciences. (2) Or, let it stress *social background*, allowing philosophy, literature and religion to supply the trimmings. Amherst's choice of the second was partly accidental. There was need for a sophomore course that might follow a freshman history course and that might serve as an introduction both to the social sciences and to work in American civilization.

Three years before the experiment was inaugurated, a group arrived at the following decisions: (1) The course should NOT cover any defined territory or become a skeleton course in American history. No certain amount of substance would have to be covered. The group decided, rather, to choose some materials from the American past and present, on the basis of which it might compile a list of *topics for discussion*—topics not too difficult for sophomores. (2) As a corollary, bi-weekly seminar meetings were set up for groups of from 16 to 17 men. Lectures yielded to *student discussions*. On the basis of a few lectures and much outside reading emphasizing conflicting viewpoints, students prepared their papers in which they attempted to maintain an opinion of their own or to support one side. Reviewing the papers, which were submitted two days before the seminar, the instructors arranged programs that varied from week to week. Sometimes student papers were read; sometimes a student debate was scheduled; often student oral reports were emphasized.

Three aspects of the first year's work deserve mention. (1) The course became a genuine collaboration of the departments of economics, English, history, philosophy, political science and fine arts. It was interesting to work with colleagues and to see their approach to great problems and to hear their lectures. (2) The course was planned in detail *from step to step*, with a minimum of administrative machinery. Leaders met once a week at luncheon to thrash out problems arising on the march. (3) In order to discourage undergraduate "hand-downs," it was agreed to choose new projects every year (*).

Topics already used include: (1) The cause of the American Revolution. (2) The much-debated Turner thesis about the role of the frontier in American history. (3) The significance of Jackson's repeal of the charter of the Second U. S. Bank, and the problem of the monopoly of economic power in private hands. (4) The revolt of the Transcendentalists against materialism. (Students had to face the question: "Who was the typical Transcendentalist?" Literature played an important role in this discussion). (5) How far was slavery the cause of the American Civil War? (6) What is the relation between Democracy and the Gospel of Wealth? (7) Was John D. Rockefeller a robber baron or an industrial statesman? (8) Was the New Deal a revolution or an evolution?

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(*) The chief problem of the course concerned materials for background study. Amherst bought duplicate copies of some books; mimeographed rare or inaccessible articles, employed offset printing in several instances, etc. D. C. Heath and Co. of Boston has prepared a series of booklets which re-edit the basic documents used at Amherst last year, so that other schools with less effort may try the experiment with the topics listed above.

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*Discussion*

Prof. Haberley was fearful that the intermingling of departments in such a course would prove disadvantageous to the teachers of literature, but Prof. G. Harris Daggett, U. of N. H., saw value in forcing literary people to work in close harmony with social scientists.

Prof. Robert M. Mattuck, Goddard College:

"It seems to me that Prof. Whicher's course is a move in the right direction toward more democratic education. He has taken the *radical* step of having seminars for sophomores—when it is generally assumed that a student is not ready to discuss until he 'knows something'—*e.g.*, as a senior or a graduate student. But I question whether Prof. Whicher has really carried through on his idea. He quoted a student who was 'pleased that we proved what the prof didn't want us to prove.' That suggests to me that the discussion was only a disguised lecture—that there was no real attempt to help the group work out its *own* conclusions.

"Prof. Whicher also said that he begins at 'the level of student thinking,' and then went on to describe his chronological approach. I wonder if here, too, is not demonstrated a lack of courage? Why not start at what is *really* the student's own level—the things in American civilization which have taken place within his *own* lifetime? These would really be on his level as a starting point.

"I congratulate Prof. Whicher on being the first speaker of the Conference even to mention the student. It is a pathetic commentary on the isolated egotism of our teaching that we could go through almost the whole conference without ever thinking about the student—who is, after all, the one for whom it is all ultimately intended."

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Prof. Sydney R. McLean, Mount Holyoke:

"In commenting on Prof. Whicher's talk I raise two questions: (1) the potential dangers of 'nationalism' in such a course as

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the Amherst College one; and (2) the function of a literature specialist in that course as now organized. Under (2) I ask if such a 'problem' as the place of the artist in a democracy might not be a pertinent topic in the course.

"I should perhaps add that I do not regard the course as a real threat to the international spirit. I am more concerned about the growing popularity of this kind of course as a threat to the study of American literature as an art.

"The body of our literature has the quality of greatness, and its bibliography, because shorter, is much less cluttered with drivel than the bibliography of another great literature in the same language. The scholarship on it seems to me to possess something of the flexibility and unpredictability which art itself must have in order to live, for neither art nor the criticism of art moves by fixed rules.

"I think we are doing a disservice to American students if we do not somehow help them to see that patronage (in the true sense) of the arts is their problem, that some understanding of the literary art is their right. How can we do it if we permit ourselves tacitly to concede that we are not specialists?"

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Professor Pearson:

"Some questions have been raised as to whether the list of topics in the Amherst program adequately covers the field of American civilization. Speaking as an outsider who is, however, concerned in his teaching with a more or less similar problem, it seems to me to be a misunderstanding of intent if we are to view the Amherst topics so much in relation to the dissemination of data as in regard to the intellectual problems basically involved. The 1st topic, I assume, is chosen in reference to teaching students how to handle conflicting evidence of a factual nature, as is the 5th. The 2nd is in reference to the acceptance of an interpretive thesis. Mr. Whicher has indicated that this topic was somewhat less successful than the others, and I suggest that the reason for the comparative failure probably lies in the necessity of confirmatory data which the student will not have at his command. I should, however, think the topic a valuable one if only to indicate the importance of evidence as against the glibness of romantic theory. The other topics can be similarly abstracted in terms of intellectual problems and procedure. This is in my mind the chief value of the Amherst Program.

"Those of us who teach in the American field know only too well the popularity which comes from wrapping the American flag about us on the lecture platform, or necking the Statue of Liberty in public. The criticisms of too great an emphasis on purely American data are frequently deserved, since a restriction to such knowledge can lead to a provincialism which is one step worse than colonialism. But there are obvious advantages to the American student in dealing with the American scene. He comes to the seminar discussion already provided with a wealth of data which he has naturally and inevitably accumulated during his lifetime. He is, therefore, in a position where he can concentrate on its intellectual use.

For example, the student will not need to learn what is a state, a county, or the legislative system of his own country; as he must be told definition of a shire or the system of hereditary nobility which provides for a House of Lords, before he can hope to have the feeling for them which is at least as important as the fact. He is, therefore, already in a situation where, in the best sense of the word, he can begin to be sophisticated in his analysis. He can learn what questions are to be asked of any culture because he has learned method from the one he knows best. Advantages to him as an American citizen naturally accrue, but they are in terms of special dividends as distinct from the capital intellectual resources which his mind has developed as a basic security.

If there is a valid reason for the increased emphasis on American studies, apart from nationalistic encouragement, it seems to me to arise from the effort being made to provide some sort of synthesis for man's knowledge. This meets its greatest challenge in reference to the widest area of fact. The Amherst Program will be misunderstood, as will other efforts like it, if it is thought to be a substitution for courses either in American literature, American history, or any divisions of knowledge defined on national or categorical terms. It is a supplement to them, coming in relation to them in order to provide their melding, and particularly to realize under comparatively optimum conditions the training in intellectual analysis and understanding which is after all the prime concern of college training. It is based on America for the sake of utility; its intent is outside the bounds of nationalism."

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*II. FORDHAM*

(Forum on American Literature, Fordham University, April 30, 1949. Among others, Prof. Sculley Bradley, U. of Penn., and Prof. Howard Mumford Jones, Harvard, spoke. Digest of their remarks by Prof. J. Gordon Eaker).

Professor Bradley

Professor Bradley, concentrating on the American civilization program, spoke of the sense of increasing social responsibility that has come upon English departments and reminded the group that Professors Peyre and Bush at the latest M.L.A. meeting felt the newer criticism had specialized itself too far. At the same time, historians are turning from economic and political history toward cultural history, and thus the two departments are brought together. Pennsylvania has assigned a fellow for two years to find out what American civilization is and whether it can be taught as a subject, but there are already 70 degree candidates in American civilization at Pennsylvania.

American civilization is almost an area now, at least as significant as a foreign area, and owes something to the growth of general education. The programs are not intensely nationalistic, since Cambridge, Oxford, Upsala, the Sorbonne, Vienna, and Munich have chairs in American studies, Mr. Bradley said.

In practical operation, Mr. Bradley finds the most indispensable part of the program a faculty, or men who have done thinking about civilization. Then, for an interdepartmental concentra-


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tion program, in addition to basic courses in history, government, and English, the student needs something at the top to integrate it all—a senior seminar or conference course with not more than 8 or 12 students in it. This course should give its teacher regular, roster credit.

A typical seminar problem might be orthodoxy and liberalism in American life, to be covered by a series of papers by various students.

Professor Bradley feels that this new program will not weaken but strengthen the English department, though undergraduates will need a basic course in civilization in the sophomore or junior year. He finds more political science and sociology majors now taking English courses as electives and, conversely, American students are becoming increasingly aware of our English heritage — Shakespeare, Milton, the Romantics, and continental writers. The new program furthers general education and makes available for study more of the present than the conventional program does.

Professor Jones spoke on the training of teachers for American literature. Ideally the teacher should be a cultivated person, philosophically inclined, and should have studied about everything, and in addition, should have life insurance, Mr. Jones said after a long list of what colleges expect. He listed present difficulties: it is hard to place American literature graduates in jobs. The English department is intrenched and assumes that a man trained in American literature might not be able to teach freshman English! Students, too, feel that they must do double work, master both English and American, though it does not work the other way.

Assuming, however, that the American program should be mainly in the English department, Mr. Jones admitted that some requirements must be given up, and he proposed the following program as a minimum for graduate study in the three years:

*I*

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*II*

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Survey of American Literature
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*III*

Thesis and Seminar

In comment, he said that we must assume an undergraduate background in English literary history and American political history. Much of the Renaissance, such as Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, Marlowe, Greene, and Peele must be given up and the Renaissance organized about ideas such as the individual, the state, nature, the dignity of man.

Similarly in the Age of Reason and the Romantic Movement, the courses should include the European background. Defending the arts, he mentioned the contribution of the Hudson River school of painters, architecture, and photography to American civilization. Of religious ideas and institutions, he said that because values in the course tend to become literary, Puritanism is stressed too much and other movements are neglected, such as Evangelicism, the Quakers, the Mormons, Christian Scientists, and Catholicism.

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## Teach the Short Story with Models

In a writers workshop a study of professional models in the short story is an essential, and most courses urge some form of imitation of the model story. Even if this procedure is not encouraged, students instinctively try to incorporate into their own efforts what they judge to be the successful elements of the professional story. In itself this method of learning has distinct advantages. Yet, particularly in the short story, student work tends to reflect mannerisms, accidentals of style, and stock situations lifted indiscriminately from stories read or analyzed.

The Marycrest college short story workshop is experimenting with a method that achieves the advantages of the study of models and avoids the pitfalls of faulty and crippling imitation. Its theory is that a tendency to imitate tricks of language and stylistic mannerisms proceeds from a failure to grasp the nature of literary structure and form—the element in models that may be used profitably in terms of a new story.

In order to bring into focus the element of literary form, this workshop uses models translated from current foreign fiction, preferably Latin American. The steps are as follows: (1) The student translates the story being studied from the original language; or from a literal unidiomatic version she produces an improved translation. Here the student is developing a personal style in terms of accurate diction and the use of the English idiom for maximum effectiveness. She is better able to concentrate here on this important element in her training, since she is not yet distracted with the more intricate problem of structure. (2) Students work together in discovering the technique used by the foreign author and the evidence of pattern or design in his narrative. (3) Imitating the essentials of this technique which have to do with literary form, they write original stories with familiar settings and characters. (4) With this heightened experimental grasp of the structure of the short story they write original stories without reference to any definite model. After completing their first draft they make revisions aided by a further study of some story similar in theme to their own. For this last step students do not use foreign stories exclusively.

In practice the experiment began with the translation of a story by Chilean author Eduardo Barrios, "Papa and Mama." The story opens with a mood picture like a silhouette—a mother waiting at nightfall for the return of her husband. The main body of the piece is a game of house played by her two children. Distinguishing elements in the structure are the use of a dramatic form so that the story looks like a one-act play; and an economical revelation of character at least on a double level. With remarkable impact the story unfolds a telling moment in the lives of the two children, gives by indirection the near-tragic relations of the parents, and obliquely suggests the imprint of the parents' lives on the children.

When this story was rendered in modern English idiom and colloquial child-language, students were struck by the incongruity between the diction and the old world setting, culture, and situation. This incongruity served, too, to isolate for purpose of study various elements in the art piece.

The student imitations, though intended only to be exercises, were varied and successful. Many variants on the original suggested themselves. One story, "The Gorgeous Dress," used little girl characters playing movie stars with ironic suggestion that the game was far-reaching and significant. Another, "Concerto Detour," told of a boy home from college who was showing a girl—a product of his old environment—how the experts teach piano. His mimicry of his teacher merges into a revelation of the real changes wrought in the boy and emphasizes the distance that has grown up between the two friends after a year's separation.

These—and others—were stories successful in their own right. Beginning writers avoid the common pitfalls of the unmanageable plot and over-stocking with poorly developed characters. They learn the essentials of the short story as a literary *genre*.

The theory of the method is important: true imitation of models focuses on reproducing the form while developing originality in style—in diction and selection of story situation.

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### Three Themes for Story Writers

In teaching a course in Advanced Fiction Writing at Columbia University Summer Session, I kept the emphasis on three simple themes.

I. THE READER. The two human beings chiefly concerned in a story are the author and the reader. The reader has his rights. In him, too, inheres the sanctity of the individual, not to be wantonly offended or corrupted. And the reader has his abilities. To put it mildly, there are some things he does not have to be told twice and others he does not need to be told at all. The value to a story writer of a good sound sense of the reader is analagous to a playwright's sense of audience.

II. THE PLOT. Under plot I attempted to include the elements of craftsmanship that seem to be teachable, agreeing with Aristotle that the plot is the chief of these. I assumed that those who signed up for a class in fiction writing ought to try to write not simple discriptions of moods, emotions, persons or places, but stories. No plot, no story.

III. THE AUTHOR. I know of nothing better to teach than this: that an author is morally responsible for his selection and evaluation of material and artistically responsible for his execution of the work; that an effective selection, evaluation and execution requires a clear development of his personal dramatic insight, and that to be a good writer of fiction is therefore to devote yourself to a life of spiritual labor.

Some members of the class were startled; they all were interested; and they worked hard.

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### Me or My?

A statement frequently met with in manuals on usage is that a noun (or pronoun) preceding a gerund must be in the possessive case. That is, the rule would support "It is a question of John's making up his mind," but would reject "It is a question of John making up his mind."

Of course, a rule which states that a noun before a *gerund* must be in the possessive case is correct. But it is a mistake to believe that all *-ing* verbals following nouns are gerunds. The fact is that there are two different constructions each of which is correct. We may have (1) a gerund modified by a preceding noun (or pronoun) in the possessive case; we may also have (2) a noun (or pronoun) in the nominative or objective case modified by a following *participle*. We may say, of course, "It is a question of my going," in which the gerund *going* (object of the preposition *of*) is modified by the possessive *my*. But we may also rightly say "It is a question of me going," in which *me*, the object of the preposition *of*, is modified by the participle *going*. Either statement is correct. Which is to be used in a given situation will depend upon the emphasis desired and the limitations of the language itself.

It is true that the gerund-modified-by-a-preceding-possessive generally expresses the idea more neatly than would the noun-modified-by-a-participle construction. "I do not object to your writing your themes on a typewriter" is certainly to be preferred to "I do not object to you writing your themes on a typewriter." Yet there are many instances in which one construction is just as precise and just as legitimate as the other, the choice between them depending on where the major emphasis is to lie. "I had a glimpse of Fred dodging this way and that" (roughly equivalent to "I had a glimpse of Fred, who was dodging this way and that") or "I had a glimpse of Fred's dodging this way and that" (roughly equivalent to "I had a glimpse of a dodging which had to do with Fred"). One is just as legitimate as the other, but the two are *not* interchangeable. The first emphasizes the person concerned—namely Fred; the second emphasizes the action concerned—namely, dodging.

In other words, a noun (or pronoun) usually carries a more important notion than does a modifying adjective. Therefore, if the idea of the verbal is the major idea, the gerund-modified-by-a-possessive will be the choice. But if the idea of the person involved is the major idea and the idea of the verbal is the lesser, then the noun (or pronoun) -modified-by-a-participle will convey the precise meaning intended.

Finally, there are situations in which, because of the very limitations of the English language itself, the pronoun-modified-by-a-participle is the only possible construction; for some pronouns have no possessive forms. We cannot say, for instance, "There is no question of that's being true"; for the pronoun *that* has no such possessive as "that's." Consequently, whether we like it or not, we are forced by the limitations of the language to say "There is no question of that being true." We can never say "He must now face a request for his resignation, the possibility of which's being demanded never before having entered his head." Because there is no recognized possessive form "which's", we must use the participial construction and say "He must now face a request for his resignation, the possibility of which being demanded never before having entered his head."

The rule in the handbook should be formulated in such a way as to make clear the grammatical legitimacy of the noun (or pronoun) -modified-by-a-participle construction whenever either the precise meaning intended or the actual limitations of the language demands it.

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